

18 JULY 1979

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10-1-81

Ex-Top Officers Split on Arms Pact; Some Call it a Peril, Others Useful

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, July 17 — A group of retired military officers differed today on whether the arms-limitation treaty with the Soviet Union was a sound agreement.

Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Adm. Elmo R. Zumwalt, former Chief of Naval Operations, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the treaty was militarily dangerous and politically unsound. They urged that it be substantially amended to reduce what they viewed as the most menacing components of the Soviet strategic forces.

Three other retired officers testified that the treaty was a useful step in beginning to restrain the size of the Soviet nuclear arsenal and that unfortunate military and political consequences would follow rejection of the accord.

The three men who favored the treaty were Adm. Noel Gayler, former commander of United States forces in the Pacific; Gen. Russell E. Dougherty, former commander of the Strategic Air Command, and Adm. Isaac C. Kidd, former commander of North Atlantic Treaty forces in the Atlantic.

Difference in Approach Noted

All the retired officers made effective witnesses, and some of their arguments seemed likely to be echoed by senators on both sides of the treaty issue. Admiral Zumwalt, one of the critics, focused his testimony on the complex provisions of the accord. The treaty advocates concentrated on more simple arguments, such as Admiral Gayler's remark that "the fewer nuclear weapons the better."

In the afternoon, the committee members went into executive session to hear testimony from Adm. Stansfield Turner, Director of Central Intelligence, and other witnesses on United States ability to monitor Soviet weapons development through electronic and satellite intelligence-gathering systems.

At the open hearing, Admirals Zumwalt and Moorer urged that the Senate amend the treaty in ways that would force the renegotiation of terms. They suggested that one amendment reduce the total number of missile launchers and bombers permitted to each side to 1,800. The treaty sets limits of 2,400 until 1982

when the limits are to be lowered to 2,250.

Admiral Zumwalt said that the Soviet Union, after a few months of objecting, would agree to renegotiate. Senator Edmund S. Muskie, Democrat of Maine, and other committee members expressed skepticism.

Admiral Moorer said he thought the United States produced the world's "worst negotiators," partly because Americans were goal-oriented and, when told to conclude a treaty, showed too much haste to get the job done.

Admiral Gayler, who was among those favoring ratification, said the "totally predictable" consequences of rejecting or basically altering the treaty would be no treaty, "more weapons in the hands of the Soviet Union" and a wave of alarm among America's allies.

Admiral Kidd said one reason he favored the treaty was that its limitations on weapons made the future military capability of the Soviet Union more predictable.

With the hearings in their second week, detailed argument over the merits of the treaty is tending to focus on some specific issues, and Admiral Zumwalt tried to address some of them.

Argument Over Heavy Missiles

Some advocates, for example, say that the Soviet monopoly on heavy intercontinental missiles is reduced in significance because the United States does not wish to build any but lighter missiles.

This is a deceptive argument, Admiral Zumwalt said, adding that the United States chose lighter missiles only because it did not seek the capability to destroy Soviet land missiles in a first strike. He said the American negotiating strategy for more than a decade had been to persuade the Soviet Union not to seek a first-strike capability. The present treaty represented a failure to achieve that goal, he said.

If the treaty is ratified and the United States exercises an option to develop a the powerful MX mobile intercontinental missile in the 1980's, it "would be a far worse world" from the viewpoint of nuclear safety, he said.